

Dear Mr. Gauthier:

Thank you for your presentation before the Mississippi River Commission during the public meeting held in Morgan City, Louisiana, on August 22, 2003. In your statement you discussed several items of concern to your community.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is aware that fluff continues to be a problem in the Bar Channel reach of the Atchafalaya River and Bayous Chene, Boeuf, and Black. Historically, and during this fiscal year, funding appropriation for this project was not adequate to dredge frequently enough to keep the bar channel free of fluff and to perform routine annual maintenance in the other reaches of the navigation channel. Between October 2002 and February 2003, approximately \$10.4 million of the \$11.7 million that was spent on the Atchafalaya River and Bayous Chene, Boeuf, and Black project was utilized exclusively to perform maintenance dredging and to construct the test section in the bar channel. Another \$400,000 was spent to complete the fluff study in the bar channel.

In the bar channel where fluff is a problem, we measure channel depth acoustically and with a lead weight attached to a wire rope, also known as a lead line. The acoustic information provides the depth to the top of the fluff. Lead-line data reveal the depth to the hard bottom. Currently, the top of fluff in the bar channel ranges from -14 feet to -26 feet Mean Low Gulf (MLG), and the hard bottom readings range from -15.5 feet to -29 feet MLG.

The United States Coast Guard is responsible for establishing and maintaining the aids to navigation (ATON) on

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Federal navigation channels. We are aware of frequent concerns regarding movement of and damage to navigation aids. To assist the Coast Guard in their maintenance, New Orleans District personnel routinely collect electronic position data for the ATON while performing channel surveys. The electronic positions are included in the survey plots that the New Orleans District provides to the Coast Guard, Morgan City Harbor and Terminal District, and other channel users. Additionally, recent channel surveys, which include the electronic positions of the ATON at the time of the survey, are generally available on the New

Orleans District website at [www.mvn.usace.army.mil/ops/odt/nav-cond.htm](http://www.mvn.usace.army.mil/ops/odt/nav-cond.htm). We will continue to support the Coast Guard ATON program and channel users by providing updated information as it becomes available.

Navigation channels in the Morgan City area have an authorized depth of 12 feet, as indicated on the enclosed map. The Atchafalaya River and Bayous Chene, Boeuf, and Black have an authorized depth of 20 feet. Project depths are defined in the Congressional legislation that authorizes construction and maintenance of each specific navigation project. Congressional authority is required to change the depth of any navigation channel.

Maintenance activities are currently underway in the 20-foot navigation channel. With the receipt of an additional \$6 million in June 2003, the New Orleans District initiated work in Bayou Chene and the Horseshoe reaches in preparation for the transport of the Holstein Topside Component that is scheduled for March 2004 and for four additional fabrication projects at the J. Ray McDermott Fabrication Yard in Amelia. Dredging in the Horseshoe reach was completed on September 4, 2003. The Horseshoe channel reach currently provides full-project width and depth. The dredging in the Bayou Chene reach is ongoing and is scheduled to be completed in February 2004. Maintenance will be conducted in the Bar Channel and Bay Channel reaches prior to the movement of the Holstein Topside Component in March 2004.

The New Orleans District continues to strive to maintain the 20-foot project with the funds that are appropriated annually by Congress. When additional study funds become

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available, we will continue to investigate and evaluate methods to solve the problem of fluff and to improve the operability of the channel at Morgan City.

The Commission appreciates receiving your views and will be pleased to hear from you at our future public meetings.

Sincerely,

Don T. Riley  
Brigadier General, U.S. Army  
President Designee, Mississippi  
River Commission

Enclosure